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The Iowa Ornithologists' Union was organized at Ames, Iowa, February 28, 1923, for the study and protection of native birds and to promote fraternal relations among Iowa bird students.

The central design of the Union's official seal is the Eastern Goldfinch, designated State Bird of Iowa in 1933.

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EDITORIAL AND PUBLICATION OFFICE
WINTHROP, IOWA



SCREECH OWL

From a painting by E. W. Steffen

IOWA OWLS I KNOW

By EARNEST W. STEFFEN

CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA

(Illustrations by the author)

During the Christmas census in Cedar Rapids, the group on several occasions went through what we thought was good owl territory. We scanned the trees carefully for a view of an owl hugging the trunk. We inspected the ground under promising trees for pellets. Our efforts were all in vain, however, for no owl did we see. Yet there are owls in this territory.

Owls have a peculiar interest, and affect one in a different manner from any other bird. That is normal, no doubt, for they are much different in appearance, have very peculiar eyes set differently in the head, are nocturnal in habits, and utter their cries at night in a decidedly hair-raising manner. Then too their flight is different. It is noiseless and, it seems, effortless. Their very appearance and manner make them seem well fitted for the somber solitudes of night.

It occurs to me that the ornithologists did not decide very early upon the placement of the owl in systematic ornithology. Early in the century they placed him with the Birds of Prey as a suborder of Raptores, between the doves and parrots. The present ornithologists have shoved him much higher in the scale—several orders above the Birds of Prey—and have elevated him to an order of his own: Strigiformes. He reposes now in the systematic order between the Cuckoos and the Goat-suckers.

My earliest experience with owls, and for a number of years the only experience, was with the Screech Owl. This was the Eastern Screech Owl (*Otus asio naevius*). How well do I remember the quavering voice in the night, and the fear it engendered in me! And how well do I remember that I pulled the covers over my head, if I were in bed, to shut out the dread sound! I recall that when a boy I captured a number of these Screech Owls, both young and old, at different times. I discovered how fiercely they could bite, how strong and sharp were their claws, how very small were their bodies for so large an appearing bird, yet how strong and wiry they were, and how fluffy and luxurious were their feathers.

The Screech Owl with a body no bigger than a sparrow's is a fierce little bird with strength to match its fierceness. It can handle prey larger than itself without much difficulty. Authorities have tried to give it a good reputation by reciting its food habits. During the summer this owl eats many grasshoppers and other large insects. In fact, it is given credit for eating more insects than any other owl except the Burrowing Owl. Undoubtedly its main article of diet is mice and other injurious rodents. According to Fisher, its diet consists of birds only one-seventh. Others claim the percentage considerably higher and recommend that the Screech Owl be drastically reduced in number. I recall that Althea Sherman so recommended.

The Screech Owl nests in old woodpecker holes or in natural cavities in trees and, no doubt, roosts in similar places. Many other birds, especially our resident birds, use such places also as nesting and roosting places. I have often wondered whether this owl in its search for a roosting place and a nesting place would not chance upon many a bird and eliminate it from the picture. Why could it not develop the habit of searching for its prey in holes and cavities?

The next species of owl with which I got acquainted was the Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus flammeus*). This was the first of the larger owls



SCREECH OWL



SHORT-EARED OWL

may be seen on dull cloudy days. Their habits are entirely, or almost entirely, good. They take a few ground-skulking birds, but live almost entirely on mice, ground squirrels, young rabbits, and such fare. Although it does not come down into Iowa in numbers until the winter season, the Short-ear frequently falls victim to the hunter. Many game species, including the pheasant, occupy the same kind of environment as the Short-eared Owl. This owl is a useful bird and should not be killed, a fact that all hunters should learn.

The foregoing observations are from impressions received while I was young, and while still living in Grundy County. My observations of these owls around Cedar Rapids have not been very numerous. Two other owls, however, I have noted with interest in and near Cedar Rapids. These are the Barred Owl and the Great Horned Owl.

My first observation of the Northern Barred Owl (*Strix varia varia*) was within the city when, on a dull, cloudy day, I noticed a large owl being hounded by a number of other birds, chiefly Blue Jays. The owl paid very little attention to the birds, seeming actually to ignore them. He stayed in one place long enough for me to identify him, then flew away among the trees with a following of crying birds. I had received impressions from books that owls saw well only at night, but I noted that this owl missed all the trees and seemed to be able to avoid objects without trouble. I at once gave up the impression that owls cannot see by day. My second observation of this owl was also within the city. This time one came to our yard and stayed for quite some time. As he sat in a large black oak not more than 20 feet away in early evening I got a very good look at him. As I watched him and tried to fix in my mind the pose, the proportions, form, and other features, it occurred to me that in some way he was different from other owls. I puzzled over that for quite a while. Finally I decided that it was his eyes. The Barred Owl has dark brown irises instead of yellow ones as most owls have. The food habits of the Barred Owl are almost entirely good. Very few birds are taken. This fact should be better known to farmers and hunters.



BARRED OWL

The Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus virginianus*) is, however, a bird of a different color. "Tiger of the Air" is a title that aptly describes this owl. Poultry not housed are freely taken as are also various kinds of game birds and other large birds. The one redeeming trait of this owl is the fact that he does not hesitate to take the common domestic cat as one item of prey. That should do his reputation a great deal of good. One often sees the carcasses of these birds draped on the fence or some other prominent place, to advertise the prowess of some farmer or gunman. They seem able to hold their own, however, for there are many wooded tracts where one may hear at night the hoot of the Horned Owl as well as the Barred Owl. These sounds are, indeed, a thrill to any birdman.



GREAT HORNED OWL

THE ANNUAL CONVENTION

The 22nd annual convention of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union will be held at Des Moines on Sunday, May 14, with the Des Moines Audubon Society as host.

The same factors which cut down on the convention activities last year are even more influential this year, and we are fortunate again in having a central location for the meeting. Tentative plans call for a convention similar to that held at Cedar Rapids in 1943, with a field trip in the morning, a noon luncheon, and a short business meeting in the afternoon, followed by an informal social get-together.

In order to arrange for field-trip transportation, the noon luncheon, and a meeting place, will each member who expects to attend please notify the Secretary, Miss Serbousek, by post card by May 1, telling how many people you will be bringing, and whether or not you will take your car. You will be answered with a statement as to time and place of meeting and other details which will have been arranged. If there are any last minute changes in your plans, I would suggest writing to the secretary of the Des Moines club, Mrs. Lester W. Haskell, 236 East Creston, Des Moines.

The officers very cordially invite you to attend, and all members should be glad of the chance to renew and increase friendships. As to gasoline, let your conscience be your guide. The Des Moines Audubon Society is one of our largest and most active local groups, and their President, Miss Irene M. Smith (2923 Rutland Ave.), assures us of the fullest hospitality.—MARTIN L. GRANT.

AN IOWA BIRD ARTIST

On January 3, at the monthly meeting of the Cedar Rapids Bird Club, Earnest W. Steffen gave a very interesting lecture on "Bird Artists and Their Work", a subject on which he is well qualified to speak, for he is a bird artist of ability and is fast gaining a reputation as such. Three of Mr. Steffen's drawings have appeared in 'Iowa Bird Life' and we have the promise of others in the future. We are grateful to him for the fine pictures which have embellished our pages. He is an able writer as well as an illustrator, a fact brought out in his article on owls in this issue. Mr. Steffen lives at Cedar Rapids, where he is a teacher in the public schools. The bird club in that city finds him a cooperative and valuable member.



MR. STEFFEN

Mr. Steffen's introduction to birds came at an early age. This was, to put it into his own words, "before I was able to comprehend what it was all about. With a considerable portion of the money laboriously saved by my parents for a baby carriage, my father bought Ridgway's *Manual of North American Birds*. Thus I was never perambulated. Whether I walked any sooner as a result, I am unable to say, but I did come to treasure the *Manual*. It is still a valued volume in my library, much worn and dog-eared to be sure, but still useful and wholly intact."

At about the age of 11 he was inspired to draw and color a representative of each genus of the birds of North America, a project that required a period of three or four years but was nevertheless completed. The budding artist used nickel tablets and colored his drawings with wax crayons, and while the finished product probably did not entirely satisfy him, it did indicate what his interests and inclinations were. Later in life, art training was received at Cornell College. There his chief art interest was

birds, but he felt it was necessary to learn to paint landscape and bent his efforts largely toward that end. He received his B. A. degree from Cornell in 1915.

During subsequent years Mr. Steffen's career has been varied. Circumstances decreed that his interest in bird painting had to be secondary, and it was not until about 1932 that his ideas of what he wanted his bird paintings to be definitely took shape. When this was decided upon, he began a program of bird painting and drawing, which through quite steady work has resulted in a series of over 120 oil paintings of the more common birds of Iowa, as well as between 300 and 400 pencil drawings based upon the oil paintings. In addition, he has 20 new water-color paintings portraying the Iowa winter birds with appropriate winter landscapes. These have been exhibited at meetings of the Cedar Rapids Bird Club and at other gatherings, where they have drawn much praise for his work. This project of painting Iowa birds, he says, is only well begun.

In preparing himself to paint birds, the Cedar Rapids artist felt it necessary to become familiar with the pose, form, haunts and habits of each species so that it would be pictured exactly true to life and in natural surroundings. This requires constant observation of the most exacting kind. He does not depend on museums or skins though he has used museum facilities to some extent. He comments on this phase of the work: "I do not depend upon other artists, for I wish to develop a style and technique distinctly my own; yet I cannot deny that I have made a considerable study of the work of other artists, chiefly Fuertes and Brooks. However, I do depend on the living bird, and check my paintings constantly as I observe the birds from time to time."

It is interesting to know that the picture of the Screech Owl appearing in this issue was worked upon during a period of about two months. The artist tells us: "I made one in pencil at first, adding tempera to bring out high lights and deep darks. Then I placed it in the room to see whether I could live with it or not. I couldn't. Then I made one in black and white wash and put it to the test as I did the other one. But again I couldn't live with it. Criticism began to develop until it became necessary to make another picture. The final picture seems to stand the test, as I had it under constant observation for three weeks or more."

KATE LA MAR BLOSSER

1889-1944

Kate LaMar Blosser was born November 21, 1889, at LaMar Station, Missouri. Her untimely death occurred on February 6, 1944, at Patterson, Iowa, where she had lived since her marriage to Mr. Noah J. Blosser on June 9, 1940. Her death was caused by a malignant abscess on the lung. She had been in excellent health, apparently, until the latter part of last November.

Kate, as she was called by everyone who knew her, attended Marysville State Teachers College in Missouri, and was graduated from Warrensburg State Teachers College. After teaching several years in her home town, in Oklahoma, and in Wyoming, she came to Des Moines, Iowa, where she remained 18 years as a primary teacher in the Park Avenue and Clarkson Schools, serving also a Principal at the latter school. Her graduate work in the University of California, the University of Colorado, the University of Iowa, and the Allegheny School of Natural History, was in the various fields of nature study. In 1936 she went to the Audubon Nature Camp at Muscongus Bay, Maine, as a representative of the Des Moines Audubon Society and the Des Moines Garden Club. For 20 years Kate was a member of the Des Moines Audubon Society and served that organization as President; Chairman of the Conservation Committee; Chairman of the Program Committee; and Chairman of the Field Trip Committee. She became a member of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union in 1927, and served very faithfully as Secretary-Treasurer of this organization from 1932 to 1940. At the time of her death she was a director of the Madison County Farm Bureau, a member of the Madison County 4-H Board, and was president of the Bevington Garden Club.

Kate became a local authority on bird life, but her interest extended to the entire natural environment. For example, when the Des Moines Audubon Society fenced some marshland to preserve the nesting grounds of certain water birds, she led an interested group in making a three-year study of the area, including grasses, water plants and shrubs, as well as the nesting birds. She spent two summers in research in the Ruthven and Spirit Lake regions. An accurate observer, she was painstaking in her research. She had a natural gift for drawing, which she perfected by practice, and enjoyed illustrating her notes. Several of her articles have been published, but the bulk of her notes awaited future completion when she hoped to have more time for this kind of work. Friends prize her colored drawings of particular flowers and plants, mementos of a shared pleasure. She also made some photographic studies of birds and unusual plants.

Possessed of enormous energy and vitality, Mrs. Blosser stimulated enthusiasm in those about her. Her outstanding contribution was her



MRS. BLOSSER

ability and unfailing willingness to share her interest and her knowledge with others. She had increasing opportunities to associate with eminent naturalists. This was always regarded by her as a great privilege, but she never lost her keen and sincere interest in guiding an amateur, child or adult, in his first observations. Kate enjoyed visiting the state parks of Iowa and gained definite knowledge of birds, plants and flowers to be found in each of them. She knew where rare plants could still be found. At her home in Patterson she was collecting some of the less common native shrubs of Iowa, such as the nine bark, the button bush and the leatherwood. One of her last expressed wishes was to see again the migration of the geese on the Missouri River.

Burial was at Winterset, Iowa. She is survived by her husband, her parents who live at Elmo, Missouri, and by seven sisters and one brother. Another brother met a tragic accidental death on February 1, 1944.

—MRS. DWIGHT SMITH.

THE 1943 CHRISTMAS BIRD CENSUS IN IOWA

Early December in Iowa was mild and clear, but toward the middle of the month cold weather came with several sub-zero waves of short duration. Snowfall in most parts of the state was light, and practically none was remaining at Christmas. On the whole, the first two months of the winter presented unusually mild and open weather conditions, which account for the many records of birds that would not be found in the state during a severe winter. Christmas week was mild and ideal for making census trips. The fine weather was taken advantage of by many of our members whose names are found on the accompanying lists.

Comment on the many interesting records is desirable but is impossible due to limited space. Careful study of the tabulation will reveal much information, and it is recommended. The scarcity of Rough-legged Hawks is evident, and the entire absence of winter Horned Larks and Cedar Waxwings is quite unusual. The several records of Ruby-crowned Kinglet, formerly an extreme winter rarity, have been investigated by the Editor. The observers apparently saw their kinglets under favorable conditions, and were satisfied with the identification. We received a census from Mr. and Mrs. Ivan L. Boyd, former Iowans, taken at Baldwin, Kansas. For obvious reasons their list of 36 species could not be included in our Iowa tabulation.

Data on place, time, weather and the observers who reported are given below. (Hours are given in Central War Time.)

BACKBONE STATE PARK (Delaware Co.): Dec. 26; 9 a. m. to 4 p. m. Cloudy all day; ground bare; very light S. wind; temp. 32° at start, 40° at return; total foot mileage in the park per person, about 3; trip included an auto trip from Winthrop to the park and return on a different road, with roadside birds included in the census. Observers together. Harold Rector, Harry E. Rector, Paul A. Pierce, F. J. Pierce.

CEDAR FALLS (Snag Creek, and areas down the Cedar River: Josh Higgins Park, Hartman Reserve, Casebeer Heights; deciduous forest 40%, woodland 45%, fields 10%, marshes 5%): Dec. 26; 9 a. m. to 12:45 to 5:45 p. m. Cloudy; ground bare; all water frozen except for openings in streams; no wind; temp. 32° to 36°; total hours, 8 (7 on foot, 1 in car); total miles, 47 (10 on foot, 37 by car). Observers together. Mr. and Mrs. Martin L. Grant, Mrs. Russell Rugg, Mrs. Warren Tay, Frances Crouter.

CEDAR RAPIDS (Cedar Lake and Mound Farm areas; 3 miles along Cedar River s. e. of city; Van Vechten Park, Bever Park, Prairie Creek and Oak Hill Cemetery; mostly open woodland): Dec. 26; 9:15 a. m. to 12:30 p. m., 1:30 to 4:45 p. m. Visibility very poor; ground bare; mild s. w. wind; temp. 30° to 38°; 8 miles on foot, 8 by car. Observers in 2 groups. Mr. and Mrs. Ross Lund, Mr. and Mrs. E. J. Petranek, Lillian Serbousek, Virginia Slauson, E. W. Steffen, Myra G. Willis.

	Backhoor State Park	Cedar Falls	Cedar Rapids	Des Moines	Dubuque	Kossuth State Park	Ledges State Park	Mt. Vernon	Ottumwa	Sioux City	Tama	Waterloo	Waukegan State Park
Mallard				300					100-5000				
American Pintail									1				
American Golden-eye				2									
American Merganser		2			1								
Sharp-shinned Hawk									1				
Coeper's Hawk		2											
Red-tailed Hawk	2	1	3	5		3	3	2	1	8	6	3	3
Red-shouldered Hawk		5		5						1		1	
Rough-legged Hawk											1		1
Bald Eagle					3				1				
Marsh Hawk	1		1	6		1		1	1		4		
Sparrow Hawk			1	3		2				1	1		
Bob-white			28	37		21		15	30				
Ring-necked Pheasant	4	2					3			1	19	2	
American Coot										1			
Herring Gull					10								
Mourning Dove	1	1		6	1	8		1	2		3		32
Screech Owl			3	1						2	2		
Great Horned Owl	1	1		4		1	2			3			
Barred Owl	1			5		1			1		1	1	
Long-eared Owl				4	1								
Short-eared Owl		1		2									
Saw-whet Owl				1		1			2				
Boiled Kingfisher		1	1	1									
Flicker	3	6	1	15		7	5	1		15	3	2	22
Pileated Woodpecker	1												
Red-bellied Woodpecker	7	7	4	17	3	1	6	1	2		3	10	12
Red-headed Woodpecker			10	4						5			
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker				1									1
Hairy Woodpecker	1	5	9	20	3	2	3	1	1	5	2	3	
Downy Woodpecker	8	12	14	51	10	5	6	1	5	19	20	14	21
Blue Jay	15	30	35	77	20	10	3	4	9	2	7	12	6
American Magpie													
Crow	27	35	12	3575	100	5	24	7	1	772	175	38	1
Chickadee	18	75	125	333	35	12	65	2	14	72	26	110	26
Tufted Titmouse			2	47	20	8		1	8				5
White-breasted Nuthatch	12	18	30	63	15	7	22	5	7	17	11	21	5
Red-breasted Nuthatch				2	1		1	1		3			2
Brown Creeper	1	9	2	6	1	2	9	1		5	3	4	
Winter Wren	1												
Catbird									1				
Brown Thrasher		1		1									
Robin						1			1	9			9
Bluebird						1				4	2	3	
Golden-crowned Kinglet		17		3	12		15		4	1	3		
Ruby-crowned Kinglet		1								1	2		
Starling	10	100		200	20	50	3	47	15	5	79		365
English Sparrow	70	20	500	953	250	100	240	63	25	135	200	210	40
Eastern Meadowlark									2				
Red-winged Blackbird				7						14	275		
Rusty Blackbird													26
Bronzed Grackle										564	8	4	
Cardinal	1	14	15	132	21	10	5	4	12	6	16	19	30
Purple Finch	4	5	3	54	4	5	1	13				12	
Pine Siskin		2											
Goldfinch	3	80		88		8	5		12	7	5	21	2
Red Crossbill					2								
State-colored Junco		4	250	75	630	75	200	40	36	36	41	39	187
Tree Sparrow	400	100	30	460	100	28	55	29	30	31	26	36	240
Harris's Sparrow			1	5						3			8
White-crowned Sparrow			2										
Song Sparrow		1	7	8			4		2		2	1	1
Number of Species	24	30	33	41	25	24	24	22	30	33	28	22	23
Number of Observers	4	5	8	9	7	1	3	2	5	12	2	3	1

*See data under station in body of article.

Total Iowa List 62 species

(EDITOR'S NOTE. Feb. 26: The February issue of 'Audubon Magazine' contained two censuses not published above—Atlantic and Davenport. The Atlantic census was sent to 'Iowa Bird Life' but was received too late for publication. The Atlantic list contained 6 species not listed above, and Davenport contained one. These, if published in 'Iowa Bird Life', would have made the Iowa total 69 species. 'Audubon Magazine' credited Dubuque with a record of White-winged Crossbill; this error was corrected to Red Crossbill before our list was compiled.)

DES MOINES (Charles Sing Denman Wood, Dove Woods along Beaver Creek, Crocker Woods, Waukonsa, Sycamore Park, woods along Des Moines River from Euclid Ave. to Lovington, Walnut Woods State Park, Brown's Woods, Morning Star): Dec. 21; 8:30 a. m. to 6 p. m. Clear; no snow; wind s., 14 m. p. h.; temp. 24° all day; half the trip on foot, half by car. Observers in 5 groups. Mrs. Toni Wendelburg, Olivia McCabe, Irene M. Smith, Bruce F. Stiles, Albert C. Berkowitz, Mrs. Joe Chamberlain, Dwight T. Smith, Jack Musgrove, Mrs. H. R. Peasley.

The White-crowned Sparrows were studied at close range with 8-power binoculars by Stiles, Peasley and Musgrove.

DUBUQUE (Linwood and Mt. Calvary Cemeteries, Gen. Pike Lock and Dam, Ham Island): Dec. 26. Cloudy; ground bare; river frozen above dam, open below dam; no wind; temp. 28° to 42°; 5 miles on foot, 5 by car. Observers together. Ival Schuster, Mrs. Robt. Ruegnitz, J. Dockal, Geo. Crossley, Henry Herrmann, David Reed, Mrs. Ralph Johnson (Dubuque Bird Club).

KEOSAUQUA STATE PARK: Dec. 26; 10 a. m. to 2 p. m. Cloudy and misty. Warren N. Keck.

LEDGES STATE PARK, Boone Co., and AMES, Story Co. (oak-hickory hills 60%, elm bottoms 30%, open farm land 10%, along Des Moines River in State Park, and at golf course, Iowa State College, Ames): Dec. 19; 6½ hours. Partly cloudy; ground with trace of snow; little open water in river; wind n. and w., 10 m. p. h.; temp. 30° to 35°; 5 hours on foot, 1½ in auto; 33 miles in auto, 5 on foot. Observers together. Geo. O. Hendrickson, Stanwood K. Bolton, Jr., Sam W. Gadd.

MOUNT VERNON (circle north of town through farm lands and south of town through timber along the Cedar River): Dec. 21; 9 a. m. to 12:30, 1:30 to 5:30 p. m. Clear; ground bare; edge of river only was frozen; strong wind; temp. 35° to 26°; 15 miles by car, 6 on foot. David Ennis, J. Harold Ennis.

OTTUMWA (Community Gardens and Lake Wapello): Dec. 26; 2:30 to 5:30 p. m. Cloudy and misty; temp. 42° at start, 36° at return. Mary Wood, Jane Wood, Virginia Wood, Pearle Walker, W. W. Aitken.

SIoux CITY (Brown's Lake area, Brower's Lake area, War Eagle's Monument Park woods, along confluence area of Missouri and Big Sioux Rivers, lower Riverside area; hill woodland, mature deciduous virgin heavy timber land 65%, lake and river country 25%, open hill and lowland 10%): Dec. 19; 10 a. m. to 7 p. m. Clear; ground mostly bare, with some large patches of hard-packed snow still remaining from blizzard of Nov. 7; all lake water except area south of Hoevers Island frozen over, Missouri River with some ice in it, Big Sioux frozen over; wind n., n. w., 18 m. p. h.; temp. 30°. Observers in 5 groups. Mr. and Mrs. W. J. Armour, W. W. Trusell, Zell C. Lee, Karl Kuhlmann, Don Bushar, Dr. and Mrs. J. L. Schott, Carl Wellhausen, Mrs. Mayme Brown, Mrs. Marie Dales, Mrs. Max Foster (Sioux City Bird Club).

TAMA (and vicinity, including radius of 4 miles west, south and east of city—about the same area as reported from in past years): Dec. 25; 9 a. m. to 12, 1 to 5 p. m. Clear; temp. 30°. Observers together, in car most of the trip. Mr. and Mrs. W. G. MacMartin.

WATERLOO (and some areas near Cedar Falls): Dec. 28; 9 a. m. to 3:15 p. m. Slightly cloudy till noon, clear in p. m.; ground bare and dry; no wind; temp. 9° at start, 25° at return; 25 miles by auto, 5 on foot. Mrs. John Barlow, and Misses Mary Young, Katherine Young, Carrie Neidy, Mardell Holley, Katherine Perry, Myra E. Loban, R. Lucile Loban (Waterloo Audubon Club).

WAUBONSI STATE PARK (chiefly within the park's 630 acres of Missouri loess bluffs; s. e. 4 miles and return by auto, also 3 miles s. w. and return): Dec. 23; 10 a. m. to 12:30, 1:30 to 5 p. m. Clear; 2 in. of 2-weeks-old snow on sheltered slopes; light, raw s. e. wind; temp. 2° at start, 10° at return; 5 miles on foot, 6 on horseback, 14 by car. M. L. Jones.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE SECOND ANNUAL IOWA SPRING BIRD CENSUS

By MARTIN L. GRANT

The following rules for the 1944 Spring Bird Census have been formulated by a committee, appointed at the last annual meeting, consisting of F. L. R. Roberts, Chairman, C. C. Ayres, and Helen M. Peasley.

Friday, Saturday, or Sunday, May 5, 6, or 7 (any one of the three days) is the time set. The actual choice of which week-end to use was left to the President. The following data should be included in the report: (1) Location. (2) Date. (3) Description of territory covered. (4) Weather. (5) Number of observers participating. (6) Number of miles covered on foot and by other means, to be listed separately. (7) Number of hours spent in the field. (8) Names of all species observed, arranged in official A.O.U. order, preferably on one of the check-list cards of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union. These cards may be obtained from the Secretary for 1c each. (9) Number of individuals of each species seen. The letters "C" for counted, or "E" for estimated may be appended to the number for each species. (10) Signature of the person or persons responsible for compiling the report.

The following quotation is from the report of the committee: "In sending in reports of these field trips, any doubtful records should be discarded. Birds which may not reasonably be expected in your locality should not be recorded unless the circumstances under which they have been observed are such as to leave no doubt as to their identification. If rare or accidental species are reported, the names of the persons seeing them, and the conditions under which they were observed should be reported in full. Records of our field observations can have considerable scientific value only if they do not contain internal evidence of careless or incompetent observation."

The census data should be mailed to Myrle L. Jones, Waubonsie State Park, Hamburg, Iowa. If they are sent in immediately, it may be possible to present a preliminary report of the census at the annual meeting, which will be the following Sunday. Any suggestions regarding modifications or changes in the census rules will be in order for discussion at this meeting. Do not mail censuses later than June 1st.

The initial census last year seemed to be a very popular feature of the Union's activities, and it is hoped that all local groups of bird students throughout the state will be represented this time.

GENERAL NOTES

Bird Notes from the Ottumwa Vicinity.—On June 15, 1943, we located the Mockingbird and Orchard Oriole a mile south of Ottumwa. Both birds nest there, and we were told that the Mockingbird has been returning to the same locality for a number of years. I went to the place several times and heard the Mockingbird sing, though later in the summer it was less in evidence. We found the nest of the Orchard Oriole and I have it in my collection. Norman Burke and I saw a Mockingbird in Memorial Park on February 20, 1944.

I saw a Kentucky Warbler in the Community Gardens on September 19, 1943. It was in some shrubbery close to one of the ponds and I had an excellent opportunity to observe the bird through my binoculars. It is very uncommon in this vicinity. The Community Gardens also gave me the sight of a Catbird on December 19, 1943. It was in the underbrush, and though there was some snow on the ground, it didn't seem to mind.

About November 15, 1943, an immature Bald Eagle was shot. We went out to the place, which was not far from Ottumwa, and identified the bird, and the identity was later verified by Jack Musgrove. Its wingspread was nearly six feet.—CHARLES C. AYRES, JR., Ottumwa, Iowa.

Pileated Woodpecker in Clinton County.—On July 3, 1943, while fishing along the Wapsipinicon River near Wheatland, my sister Dolly and I saw two Pileated Woodpeckers. Again in November one was in the vicinity. On December 30, 1943, we followed a Pileated for approximately a mile through those woods, watching it hammer huge chips from oak trees, and hearing its call, which is much louder and slower than that of the Flicker. On our December 30 trip, we also observed Red-shouldered Hawk, Ring-necked Pheasant, Barred Owl, Red-bellied, Red-headed, Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers, Blue Jay, Crow, Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Starling, English Sparrow, Cardinal, Goldfinch, Slate-colored Junco and Tree Sparrow.—C. ESTHER COPP, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Returns from Banded Birds in Jackson County.—The following records of banded birds recovered in Jackson County will be of interest:

In mid-October, 1943, Harry E. Rector shot a Pintail near Maquoketa. It carried band No. 38-635367 and was banded by H. C. Lawrence, February 13, 1938, at the Lake Mattamuskeet Refuge, New Holland, North Carolina.

A Chimney Swift was found dead at Maquoketa on September 28, 1942, just after the period of unseasonably cold weather that visited this region at that time. Its band number was 38-21455 and it was banded by B. B. Coffey, Jr., October 4, 1937, at Memphis, Tennessee.

On October 17, 1943, Ray Beckman and Earl North killed a Mallard hen on the Green Island Bottoms in Jackson County. It had been banded by J. B. Low, October 18, 1942, at the Chautauqua Refuge, Havana, Illinois (band No. 41-736384).—GARFIELD HARKER, State Conservation Officer, Maquoketa, Iowa.

Woodcocks in Southern Iowa in Summer.—My husband and I spent the summer of 1943 at the Hillculture Experimental Farm, at Floris in southern Iowa. We had the unusual experience of observing five or six young Woodcocks that had apparently hatched out in the woods near the experiment station. We stopped one evening at a neighboring farmhouse and were shocked to see a dead Woodcock upon the windowledge. The farmer had seen the birds on several occasions, so had shot one for us to identify. He told us where to look for the young, in a swampy ravine of willow and birch virtually in our backyard. Shortly after that, one was observed three-quarters of a mile from that spot. At dusk we could hear them over the fence about 200 feet from our front porch. The last we heard or saw of them was on July 21. Some of the other rather unusual birds seen on the Experimental Farm were: Yellow-breasted Chat, Bell's Vireo, Blue-winged Warbler, Lark Sparrow, Mockingbird and Orchard Oriole.—MRS. IVAN L. BOYD, Baldwin, Kansas.

The Black-throated Blue Warbler as a Delayed Migrant.—On November 20, 1943, I had the very unusual record of a Black-throated Blue Warbler at the farm home of John Allert, five miles west of McGregor, Clayton County, Iowa. I was standing near the stove in the kitchen, talking to Mrs. Allert, when I noticed a bird fluttering around against the north window screen. Mrs. Allert remarked that "a bird has been doing that all morning." I first thought it was a Chickadee and then I noticed how dark it was. Close inspection showed it to be the Black-throated Blue Warbler. It was a rare experience to be able to study this species at a distance of five to seven feet on the 20th of November! It was working over the screen, evidently finding dry bugs in the mesh. I followed the bird outside the house and it also worked up under the eaves and found something in the spider webs. It was a male bird. Mrs. Allert reported that it had been about the house the day before. This extreme delay in its migration is difficult to account for.—O. P. ALLERT, McGregor, Iowa.

The Red-breasted Nuthatch at Ames.—My earliest record for this species was made in 1923. I have had occasional records from that time on, but only one bird was seen on each occasion. On November 20, 1941, a Red-breast came to our home in Ames. The abundance of food at our station seemed to be something it could not understand. It flew madly from one place to another, eating suet, walnuts, sunflower seeds, then repeating the performance all day. The bird stayed all winter. In 1942 a Red-breast came on November 19, and again it stayed all winter. My last record for the winter of 1942-43 was May 17, a very late date. On September 15, 1943, a dead Red-breasted Nuthatch was found on the school grounds—an earlier date than I have had it at my home. My first Red-breast in the fall of 1943 was seen on October 14. It was seen again of the 17th, but it was not until November 9 that it came to the suet feeder at the back of my house and settled down as a regular boarder. Soon after this I discovered that there was more than one, and on December 2 I saw four at one time. After that date they fed hourly or oftener, and made a quick procession with the chickadees. They were quite unafraid and would come to feed while I was working a foot or two from the feeding shelf. Their appetites seemed enormous.—MRS. F. L. BATTELL, Ames, Iowa.

Red-breasted Nuthatch in Linn County.—

AT MOUNT VERNON. For the first time in many years Mount Vernon reports are available on the Red-breasted Nuthatch. Apparently the initial record was that of Miss Betty Smith, who found a dead bird on the Cornell College campus on October 4, 1943. Mrs. Forrest Millikin states that Red-breasted Nuthatches visited her feeding counter daily beginning December 14. Not more than two individuals of this species were noted at any one time. This bird was first seen at my feeding-station on December 27, 1943, and it reappeared on several occasions. The smaller size of this species and the black and white lines through the head do not allow it to be confused with its relative, the White-breasted Nuthatch.—J. HAROLD ENNIS, Cornell College, Mount Vernon, Iowa.

AT CEDAR RAPIDS. On the morning of December 29, 1943, a Red-breasted Nuthatch appeared at our feeding-station, and was seen there frequently on a number of days following. The bird fed on the suet and appeared almost as soon as it was light; it came for its last morsel as late as 5:30 p. m. This is the first time this species has been reported in this area for several years.—MYRA G. WILLIS, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Emmet County Bird Observations.—The first Blue-gray Gnatcatcher that I have seen in this vicinity was observed on May 16, 1943. The bird, a male, was observed for some time as it flitted about among the outer branches of a tall elm.

How late does a cuckoo nest? I was walking in the woods near Mud Lake on September 6, 1943, watching the ground as I walked. I heard a bird start from a low branch overhead. The foliage was dense and I saw no bird, but there was a nest in the horizontal branch which I reached and bent down enough to see two pale blue-green eggs in the loosely constructed nest. The nest and eggs belonged to one of the cuckoos, but I have not had much occasion to note the differences between those of the two species. The bird did not appear again while I was about and I do not know which one it was. It was two weeks before I could visit the place again, and then the nest was partly destroyed and empty.

During the last two years fall migration of Golden Plovers has been observed through here. In 1943 they were seen in considerable numbers on November 5. Small flocks in the air had been seen before that. In 1942 a large number remained in an alfalfa field from October 27 to November 3. In previous years I had seen them only during spring migration, the earliest record being April 21 and the latest May 21.—B. O. WOLDEN, Estherville, Iowa.

Winter Records.—Casual observations yielded the following records for Mount Pleasant during the winter of 1942-43: A Wilson's Snipe on December 22 and 23, 1942; a Red-breasted Nuthatch on January 4, 1943; and a Northern Flicker on January 17, 1943.—NICHOLAS L. and MABEL E. CUTHBERT, Mount Pleasant, Iowa.

The Upland Plover in Southern Iowa.—In May, 1942, while riding in the country, I saw four Upland Plovers in the vicinity of Moulton, a small town about 16 miles east of Centerville. On June 5, 1943, I was at the same place and drove out to a farm belonging to my brother. We were looking at a field of oats and as we walked toward the east fence, an Upland Plover came flying to meet us. It circled 50 feet or more above our heads, crying as it did so. Two other Upland Plovers were perched on fence posts a short distance away but they made no effort to approach us. As the field was soaked from recent rains, we made no effort to see if the birds were nesting. My brother informs me that a pair of these birds were in the same field during the summer of 1942. Every time he or any of the men were in the field the birds flew about them and followed them for some distance as they left the field. He thought they had a nest there, but no nest was found and no young birds were ever seen. About five miles southeast of Donnellson, Lee County, Iowa, an Upland Plover was seen perched on a telephone pole on June 7, 1943.—ALOIS JOHN WEBER, Keokuk, Iowa.

Coots Covered With Ice.—While carrying out a waterfowl investigation in northwestern Iowa 1938 to 1940, American Coots (*Fulica americana*) were often observed feeding on the accumulation of debris brought to the shore by the waves following the ice break-up in spring. The floating and semi-floating debris consisted largely of dead and green plant stems, seeds and animal matter from decaying fish and other aquatic animal life. At the edge of the debris, where the splashing waves were roiling the water and continually stirring up the debris, the Coot apparently found the choicest food particles. However, during sub-zero cold periods which occasionally occurred after the birds arrived in spring migration, the water splashing on the Coots froze to ice.

On April 4, 1940, while making spring migration observations at Round Lake near Ruthven, Iowa, I found Coots along the shore unable to fly and often barely able to walk because of the heavy loads of ice on their wings, necks, backs and sometimes on their heads. I picked up one dead Coot and three live Coots which were unable to move, while a half dozen others, walking laboriously under their loads of ice, managed to get into the water. Of these picked up one had ice over its neck and over one eye; the dead Coot had ice over its head and bill. Still others already in the water when I arrived had chunks of ice hanging from their feathers. At my approach the Coots on shore moved toward the open water and in so doing broke off some of the encumbering ice particles. Coots suffered greater mortality during cold periods than other species of water birds. During one storm, April 4-6, 1938, an estimated 100 Coots died on Mud Lake and probably many more on other lakes in the vicinity. Under an overhanging side of a muskrat lodge 14 Coots and 2 grebes were found, while around other muskrat lodges as many as 2 or 3 Coots were found dead. Dead coots along the shore were scattered, indicating that they had probably died on the water and the wind and waves had washed them ashore. Coots caked with ice during cold temperatures were extremely handicapped and undoubtedly subject to predation since they would fall easy prey to minks, foxes, dogs and other predators.—JESSOP B. LOW, Illinois State Natural History Survey, Urbana, Illinois.

RECENT BIRD BOOKS

A GUIDE TO BIRD WATCHING, by Joseph J. Hickey (Oxford University Press, New York, 1943; cloth, pp. i-xiv+1-262, with chapter-head decorations by F. L. Jaques, and bird tracks illustrated on end sheets; price, \$3.50).

Ornithology with its various angles of ecology, physiology, parasitology, taxonomy, bird banding, game management and general wildlife research, is often so bewildering to the beginner that he becomes discouraged before he has made a fair start in bird study. Mr. Hickey's new book is intended to clarify the atmosphere for the novice and show him how to proceed with a minimum of wasted effort. Each decade sees the publication of a guide for newcomers to ornithology (for example, Job's 'How to Study Birds' and Pearson's 'Bird Study Book', in past years). This new book, with its summary of accomplishments in bird work in boiled-down form and with the new trends and ideas explained clearly and concisely, will be the standard guide for at least the next decade. Its scope is much wider than its predecessors, and its pages are packed with the kind of information that bird students and bird clubs, eager to keep abreast of ornithological progress, now demand. It is in every sense an up-to-the-minute, vital book.

Mr. Hickey begins by explaining the modern art of bird watching. He tells how it may become a useful avocation leading to a lifetime of pleasure with the added possibility of making a worthwhile contribution to science. He answers many questions which beginners are certain to ask: the source of bird names, how to learn them, how to identify birds in the field and to learn their songs, how to pick a good field glass, how to meet other students, where and when to look for birds, how to take notes and keep records. There are chapters on bird migration, counting birds, distribution and food of birds, bird banding, bird watching and life-history studies. Helpful advice is given in an outline of what to publish and how to prepare manuscript. The author's simple language and enthusiastic style will hold the interest of all readers. It is not a book just for beginners. The whole broad subject of bird study is covered authoritatively with skillful sifting and assembling of facts about newest developments and discoveries in the science—knowledge that is important to all classes of bird students, from beginners to veterans. Interspersed with the serious discussion are personal anecdotes of the author which enliven the pages considerably.

The appendix is a most useful feature containing five sections. One introduces the subject of bird tracks, one gives the results of breeding-bird censuses, a third outlines a life-history study, a fourth (32 pages long) gives an annotated bibliography of bird books for all forms of reference, and the last gives the names and addresses of all local bird clubs in the United States and Canada.

High wartime production costs are indicated in the price of the book. A few years ago a book of this size without plates would have been sold for about half this figure. It is to be hoped that later editions will see these costs lowered so that the book will reach more readers and thus attain a greater usefulness.—F. J. P.

CONSERVATION AND THE SCHOOL, by Charles F. Martin and Lou A. Shepherd (Klipto Loose Leaf Co., Mason City, Iowa; cloth, pp. 1-105, illustrated; price, 60c).

Mr. Martin, senior author of this book, is Superintendent of Schools of Jackson County, Iowa, and a member of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union. The book is valuable for teachers who stress conservation in their classes, and the subject is very thoroughly covered. A full outline of the need of conservation of our depleted natural resources is given, followed by detailed plans and suggestions on how to develop an interest in wildlife study as part of the school program. The text

is based on sound conservation principles, and teachers will find excellent organization of all the material. The building of feeding-stations for wildlife is considered an important step in conducting the nature program. There are diagrams of many types of feeders, with informative detail on correct placing, kinds of foods most attractive to different species, and other useful data. Outlined according to the grades in school, from kindergarten upward, the authors give methods of keeping records and scrapbooks, making homemade movies and pictures, having school plays, and many other ways of stimulating interest in the work and making it tie in successfully with the curriculum. There is a good bibliography. Teachers have been waiting for just such a handbook.—F. J. P.

NECROLOGY

Walter D. Baker died suddenly at Ottumwa, Iowa, October 11, 1943, aged 43 years. He came to Ottumwa in 1938, and became a supervisor of elementary science studies in the grade schools, and a teacher of industrial arts in the Stuart Junior High School. Before coming to Ottumwa he taught at Nevinville and Boone. He was a graduate of the Clarinda High School and attended Iowa State College at Ames, the University of Southern California, and the University of California, at which latter school he obtained his B. A. degree. One of the hardest working teachers in the Ottumwa schools, Mr. Baker was very popular with the students and faculty. He was active in Boy Scout work and in church circles, and was very well versed in the sciences. As one of the most active members of the Ottumwa Bird Club, he will be greatly missed, for he was ever willing and able to join in making any project a success. He became a member of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union in 1939. Burial was at Los Angeles, Calif. He is survived by his mother, Mrs. Susie L. Baker, a brother Paul R. Baker, and a sister, Mary Jane, all of Los Angeles.—Charles C. Ayres, Jr.

George Seth Guion, a lawyer of New Orleans, Louisiana, and a member of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union since 1933, died at New Orleans, August 1, 1943, aged about 56. We are unable to obtain biographical data of any kind. Mr. Guion was keenly interested in birds, but he apparently did no writing for publication. His main activity was the building of a library. He had one of the finest private ornithological libraries in existence, one that was particularly rich in complete files of old and rare serial publications. He spared himself neither time nor expense in collecting these, and had a constant stream of letters going to all parts of America to obtain the publications desired. From one of his letters written in 1935 we take this interesting excerpt: "... Up in the attics of the rural homes of this nation, I'll wager there is many a priceless old magazine. I wonder if we may ever bring them to light. It is a problem, this collecting of old periodicals. I have many interesting letters from those pioneers in bird study, the old school of oologists. They hold on to their boyhood efforts in this school of journalism with a tenacity which bespeaks the great sentiment attached to it."—F. J. P.

We had hoped to present a selection from the letters of some of our members in the armed forces in this issue of 'Iowa Bird Life'. We have had interesting letters from Robert A. Pierce, with the Army in Italy; John D. Goodman, with the Army in Africa; Ralph Heuer, with the Seabees in the South Pacific. However, this issue is crowded, and these letters are necessarily deferred.

There is a newly adopted son in the Waubonsie Park home of Mr. and Mrs. M. L. Jones. This fortunate young man is Loren Keith Ransom Jones, who arrived late in 1943, at the age of one and a half years. Congratulations!